

Our Bodies, Christ's Body: Sexuality and Embodiment in 1 Corinthians

A Bible Study for Young Adults

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Purpose

This seven-session Bible study is directed to an audience of college students and other young adults. Its purpose is to help them consider issues of sexism, sexuality, and embodiment in their own lives and how the advice Paul gave to the Corinthians on these issues is relevant to them. By considering sexuality as the ground of all relationships, students can come to a deeper love for God and for other people.

Background

America's young adults live in a sexually charged world, and most of them are sexually active. A recent survey of 20,000 college students revealed that only 20% are virgins, and of those, only one third expect to remain virgins until they are married.* Discussing sexuality from a faith perspective is especially important for college students who may be away from home for the first time and are determining what values will guide their own lives, including their sexual behavior. In addition the study examines issues that are points of tension within the contemporary church and that students may encounter as future church leaders, namely homosexuality, divorce, and sexual misconduct.

1 Corinthians is uniquely suited to address these concerns. Although the book deals with a number of issues that divided the Corinthian church, themes of embodiment and sexuality run throughout — from questions the Corinthians posed about sexual behavior, food, head coverings, and the nature of the resurrected body, to the language Paul employs to describe the church as the body of Christ and the use of our own bodies in serving God, to discussion of the Eucharist, the sacrament of the body.

Approach

Using sociological, historical, and textual criticism, the study seeks to engage young adults in creative exploration of scripture and how it applies to their own lives. This context-driven approach takes a careful look at the social situation and at Greek words whose meanings might be unclear today. Discussion questions run throughout each session, urging participants to look for answers that are relevant to their lives.

Given college students' hectic schedules, long-term, intensive Bible studies are often not successful with this population. This study is therefore structured in seven one-hour sessions with no preparation required of the participants. The text of each session can be read by group members together or presented by the group leader.

The study does not cover the entire book of 1 Corinthians, but examines selected passages around weekly themes relating to sexuality and embodiment. While participants will benefit from attending all the sessions and will perceive some overarching themes of the book, each session is constructed in such a way that students can attend single sessions and not feel lost.

* Leland Elliott and Cynthia Brantley. *Sex on Campus: The Naked Truth about the Real Sex Lives of College Students*.

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